

A Beautiful Tradition: Adaptation and Ingenuity in a Century of Plateau Women's Art

ANSWER KEY Middle School

- Where is the Plateau region located? What is its main geographical feature south of the Canadian border? What cultural regions are to the east of the Plateau region?
 - The Plateau region is located between the Rocky Mountains on the east and the Cascade Mountains on the west. To the south is the Great Basin and to the north is the sub-arctic region. The main feature of the Plateau region in the U.S. is the Columbia River.*
- Which Montana tribes are Plateau tribes? *Salish, Pend d'Oreille (Kalispel), Kootenai*
- Name at least three other Plateau tribes, including one that frequently came to Montana to hunt and to trade with Plains tribes (in particular with the Crow) : *Nez Perce, Bannock, Shoshone.*
- What are two general cultural differences between the tribes of the Plateau and those of the Plains?
 - Plateau tribes were fishing cultures**, who also hunted. Plains tribes were hunters.
 - Plateau tribes were more egalitarian** between men and women—women could have leadership roles, fight in wars, and be spiritual leaders just as men could.
 - Plateau tribes did not have as much competition for resources between tribes**, because they had more food resources in their environment, so they tended to be more at peace with each other. Warfare and raiding were central to the cultures of Plains tribes.
 - Plateau villages were semi-permanent according to seasons** and were reused earthen lodges along rivers in fishing areas. Plain tribes were more mobile because they depended on bison hunting. (Salish and Kootenai also used tipis.)
- What are two cultural similarities between Plateau and Plains tribes?
 - The Salish and Kootenai had yearly bison hunts. Bison were central to the cultures and economies of Plains tribes.*
 - Some of the Plateau tribes were "horse cultures" as were the Plains tribes. The Nez Perce and Cayuse, for example, raised and bred horses and used them for trade, travel, and hunting.*
- List at least two of the art forms common among Plateau tribes before they acquired beads:
 - Coiled baskets**
 - Carving** (wood, bighorn sheep horns, stone)
 - Twined bags and baskets** (like cornhusk bags)
 - Painting and dyeing.**
- Plateau artists used many different materials (**media**) for decorative and artistic expression. List three different materials used to *make* traditional arts: *rawhide; buckskin/tanned hides; plant fibers like corn husks, Indian hemp, cattail, cedar bark, sheep horns, stone, wood.*

List three media used to *decorate* Plateau arts before Europeans and Euro-Americans came to the region: *plant dyes and clay pigments (to paint); shells; bones; plant fibers (beargrass, cedar bark, dyed corn husk, etc.)*
- Where did glass beads come from? How and when did Plateau tribes acquire them?
 - Intertribal trade routes brought European glass beads to the Plateau as early as 1600, but only rarely. Canadian and American fur traders brought beads to the Plateau via their Métis, Cree and Chippewa employees, who were the primary source for glass beads. Glass beads came to the Plateau as a regular trade item as early as 1820.*
- Beadwork styles from which other tribes/peoples influenced most of the Plateau tribes before 1880? *The fur trade tribes (Cree, Chippewa) and the mixed-heritage Métis were the main early influence on Plateau beadwork.*
- What are the names of two sizes of beads often used as trade items? *Pony beads, seed beads.*

11. Indigenous peoples of the Plateau incorporated other European and/or Euro-American materials into their art in the 19th century. Give two examples: *Wool yarn, trade cloth (wool fabric, cotton calico fabric), coins, military uniforms, metal buttons.*
12. List three of the reasons why beads quickly became very popular in Plateau (and Plains) art.
 - *Beads did not have to be harvested or soaked prior to use. Plant fibers did.*
 - *Beads were available in many colors; they did not have to be dyed like plant fibers did.*
 - *Beads made curvilinear designs possible.*
 - *Beads were a symbol of trade, well-being and affluence.*
 - *Beads could be acquired at any time of year and used at any time of year.*
 - *Beads were easy to use and beautiful to look at.*
13. The establishment of the Plateau reservations in the 1850s lumped people of many tribes together in smaller areas with limited resources. How do you think this affected Plateau arts and the materials available for the artistic/aesthetic expression of tribal cultures? *When several tribes were made to live together on a shared reservation and without access to their traditional territories, they could not obtain the resources they were accustomed to using. In addition, after the reservations were created, tribal members were more likely to marry someone from another tribe on the same reservation, and so there was an increased sharing of cultural ideas and customs. Because they did not have access to the resources they were used to using, tribal members found ways to obtain different resources, such as commercially available materials from trading posts and stores (like wool yarn, trade cloth, beads, and commercially tanned leather).*
14. What **design style** is used in the decorations on cornhusk bags and basketry of Plateau tribes? *Geometric.* What design style is most common on the beaded bags of Plateau tribes? *Realistic or representational.* Why? (What did beads allow the artist to do that could not easily be done with plant fibers, for instance?) *Beads made it possible for the artist to create curvilinear shapes that were more realistic looking than the geometric or rectilinear shapes they could make by the techniques of coiling, twining or false embroidery.*
15. What is a **motif**? *A motif is the main theme or idea in a design or pattern.* What are some examples traditional motifs used on twined Plateau-style bags, such as cornhusk bags? ***Flowers and stars** are very common traditional motifs on twined Plateau bags. Sometimes birds or other animals were also included in the designs.*

What are three common motifs found on beaded Plateau bags between 1880 and the 1940s? *Birds, flowers, horses. (also: American flags, deer, elk, cowboys, Indians, scenery.)*
16. List and describe three of the major non-Indian influences on the motifs seen in Plateau beadwork at the end of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century: *Boarding school, the reservation system, World War I. (Also, American culture in general.)*
17. What is the difference in **function** between traditional cornhusk bags and later beaded flat bags of the Plateau region?
 - ***Cornhusk bags** (twined bags in general) were used for **harvesting and storing plant foods**, like roots.*
 - ***Beaded bags**, which were often smaller, were used as **part of ceremonial regalia**, to carry personal items (like purses) and were handed down as **heirlooms**. Beaded bags were also **sold to collectors** (Euro-Americans) for cash.*
18. What is **false embroidery** (or **imbrication**) and what kind of bag is it used to decorate? What materials were traditionally used for false embroidery and what new material was used beginning in the reservation era on the Plateau (after 1855)? *False embroidery looks like embroidery, but the design is actually woven into the structure of the basket or bag. It is used to decorate twined and coiled baskets and bags. Traditionally, plant fibers like cornhusk, beargrass and Indian hemp (apocynum) were commonly used for false embroidery, but after the reservation system was established, wool yarn became available at stores and trading posts and was sometimes used for false embroidery.*

19. Describe **contour beading**: *Contour beading is when the lines of beads used in the background conform to the shape of the image in the foreground (the design motif). This **style** of beading makes the background appear to have motion or “waves” in it.*
20. Define **curvilinear**: *Describes something that is characterized by or comprised of curved lines.*
21. Describe one of the Plateau bags you like best. In your description, remember to discuss the bag’s **style, function, and composition** (media used, design style, motif, colors, etc.). Also, tell what you like about this particular bag.
- *See individual responses. Look for descriptions of bag **type, media, composition, design type, style, techniques, motif, colors**, in addition to each student’s personal assessment of the item.*
22. In what ways does the use of both new and traditional materials to create Plateau bags demonstrate continuity of cultural identity?
- Artistic skill and beauty are valued in Plateau cultures. Although some of the materials or media have changed over time, the values placed on skillful work, resourcefulness, ingenuity, and ability to make something that is both functional and beautiful have not. Therefore, women were still able to retain their identities as Plateau artists even while using new or introduced materials. In addition, the incorporation of beads into Plateau arts is consistent with the incorporation of other items obtained through intertribal trade networks.*